

Message Text

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COMUSSAG IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 037445

EXDIS TODEP 16 MILITARY ADDEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING REPEAT VIENTIANE 1500 SENT ACTION SECSTATE
INFO BANGKOK SAIGON, FEBRUARY 25TH:

QUOTE S E C R E T VIENTIANE 1500

DEPARTMENT PASS CINCPAC AND USSAG

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MCAP, EAID, LA

SUBJECT: TALK WITH PRIME MINISTER RE FORCE
REDUCTIONS AND OTHER SUBJECTS

REFERENCE: VIENTIANE 1486

1. I MET WITH PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA THIS
AFTERNOON AND DISCUSSED WITH HIM THE SERIOUSNESS OF
THE FAR AND LIF FORCE LEVEL REDUCTION PROBLEM. AS I
HAD TO SISOUK, I EMPHASIZED THE SERIOUS POLITICAL
PROBLEMS I FORESAW IF THE GENERAL STAFF WERE ALLOWED
TO DELAY ALL DEMOBILIZATION UNTIL THE END OF THE
FISCAL YEAR.

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2. SOUVANNA UNDERSTOOD PERFECTLY THE RISK TO LAOS OF

APPROXIMATELY 17,000 DISGRUNTLED SOLDIERS AND AFFIRMED SOLEMNLY AND WITH GREAT EMPHASIS THAT HE WAS GOING TO TAKE ACTION ON THIS MATTER IMMEDIATELY. HE COMMENTED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT SISOUK HAD THIS MATTER IN HAND. I SAID THAT I BELIEVED SISOUK HAD GIVEN THE NECESSARY DIRECTIVES BUT THAT THERE APPEARED TO BE A GOOD DEAL OF CONFUSION, UNCERTAINTY AND ILL-WILL IN REGARD TO THIS PROBLEM WITHIN THE SENIOR RANKS OF THE ARMY. SOUVANNA SAID HE WOULD SEE THE SENIOR COMMANDERS IN LUANG PRABANG THIS WEEK AND WOULD REPEAT THE INSTRUCTIONS HE HAD EARLIER GIVEN TO CARRY OUT A FAST AND ORDERLY REDUCTION OF FORCES.

3. TURNING TO ANOTHER SUBJECT, I INFORMED SOUVANNA THAT AID DIRECTOR MANN AND I HAD MET LAST WEEK WITH MINISTER OF HEALTH TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE MANNER IN WHICH AMERICAN AID IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC HEALTH IS HANDLED. I TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THERE WERE STILL APPROXIMATELY 1,100 LAO BEING EMPLOYED BY USAID IN HEALTH PROGRAMS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER AND THAT I BELIEVED THAT THIS DIRECT INVOLVEMENT BY THE USG MIGHT CAUSE THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE MISSION SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES WHEN THE NEW GOVERNMENT BEGAN TO LOOK INTO FOREIGN AID ACTIVITIES. MR. MANN AND I HAD ASSURED THE MINISTER OF HEALTH THAT WE WERE NOT SEEKING TO REDUCE US HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THIS COUNTRY BUT WERE SEEKING TO "LAO-IZE" TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT HE AGREED WITH THIS POLICY AND THAT HE WOULD RAISE THIS MATTER AT A FORTHCOMING CABINET MEETING.

4. SEVERAL DAYS AGO, THE PRIME MINISTER MENTIONED TO ME HIS IMPATIENCE WITH THE STUDIES AND RESEARCH WHICH HAVE BEEN GOING ON TO FIND A SUBSTITUTE FOR POPPY GROWING. IN HIS VIEW THE TIME FOR STUDIES AND RESEARCH IS PAST AND A CROP SHOULD BE SELECTED WHICH WOULD PROVIDE A GOOD LIFE FOR FORMER POPPY GROWERS. PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA'S CHOICE IS POTATOES. ACCORDING TO HIM, LAO MOUNTAINEERS KNOW HOW TO GROW POTATOES, ENJOY EATING POTATOES, CAN SELL POTATOES AND CAN DISTILL

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LIQUOR OUT OF POTATOES. POTATOES ARE THEREFORE THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM. IN THE COURSE OF MY TALK WITH HIM TODAY, THE PRIME MINISTER ASKED ME WHAT PROGRESS I MADE ON THE POTATO FRONT. I REPLIED THAT THE AID AGRICULTURAL SECTION WAS LOOKING INTO THIS IDEA AND THAT I WOULD BE DISCUSSING IT WITH OUR AID FIELD MEN THIS WEEK.

5. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT WITH THE ONSET OF PEACE HE HOPED THAT AID ACTIVITIES WOULD BE AIMED TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE AT IMPROVING THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE. UNFORTUNATELY, DURING THE WAR VAST SUMS HAD TO BE SPENT MERELY TO KEEP PEOPLE ALIVE AND LAOS HAD LITTLE TO SHOW FOR THE GENEROUS AID IT HAD RECIEVED. AS ILLUSTRATIONS OF PRESENT US EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RURAL LIFE, I CITED OUR NEW POULTRY AND FISH PROJECTS IN THE HIGHLANDS AND WAS PLEASED TO SEE THAT SOUVANNA KNEW ALL ABOUT THEM.

6. AS I LEFT PRIME MINISTER REAFFIRMED HIS DETERMINATION TO GET FORCE REDUCTIONS BEGUN IN AN ORDERLY MANNER.
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